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Written statement* submitted by the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[16 February 2015]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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The Status of Turkish Minority of Western Thrace in Education and Governmental Practices in Greece

The status and the rights of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace are established by the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923. Turkish Minority of Western Thrace has an equal right with the non-Muslim minority in Turkey to establish, manage and control at their own expense, any charitable, religious and social institution, any school and other establishment for instruction and education, with the right to use their own language and to exercise their own religion freely therein. The autonomy in education has been undermined through a number of regulations and practices in years and this caused a low-qualified education in minority schools with structural problems regarding training of teachers, the curriculum and textbooks.

During fact-finding mission in 2012 with the participation of Hans Heinrich Hansen, President of Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN), former MEP François Alfonsi (France) and Willy Fautre, Director of Human Rights Without Frontiers Int'l, the delegation found that the problems in the field of education are alarming. The rapporteur Willy Fautre noted that state intervention on minority issues to such an extent that in practice, the Greek Government has through the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs wide-ranging control over the minority schools at all levels, whether it concerns the composition and the functioning of the school boards, hiring and firing of teachers, distribution of textbooks or building and repair of school buildings.[1]

On 27 November 2014, the new Law for "Research, Technological Development and Innovation and other Provisions" was approved by the Greek Parliament. Law 4310/2014 introduces reforms and changes in administrative organizations, in issues related to teaching staff at minority schools, issues related to the functioning and scientific-pedagogical support of the minority schools, establishment of a teachers school under Democritus University of Thrace and appointment and hiring of educators to primary minority schools. Law 4310/2014 was prepared with no prior consultation and/or dialogue with the Turkish minority. During vote in the Greek Parliament, minority deputies reacted against it and criticized the Greek government did not have consultations with members of the Turkish Minority. Tough, Independent Greeks and far-right Golden Dawn party supported it.

Through new law, Minority Primary and Secondary Schools Coordinator is repealed and the Office of Minority Education is established and is included in the State Education Department of Eastern Macedonia-Thrace. Furthermore, the Council of Minority Education Registry is repealed and its powers and authorities will be conducted by State Registration Board. Relevant State registration boards will perform authority in any cases related to minority education and its administrative staff for each type of business and its relationship. ABTTF would like to stress that these would not solve current problems but extend state control over minority education.

Through Law 4310/2014, a new Department of Minority P.ogramme Teacher School which will be included in Department of Pedagogy in Democritus University of Thrace starting

[1] For the full report, please visit https://www.abttf.org/images/22_Raporlar/2012-1128-Report-Ethnic-Turks_pdf

from the academic year 2015-2016 will be established. The Department of Minority Programme Teacher School will give a graduate diploma to the Minority members who have a four year undergraduate education and the right to education in this department will only belong to those Minority members who are graduated from domestic elementary pedagogic departments in Greece. ABTTF would like to stress that the right to education in that department should not be limited to only those who are graduated from pedagogic departments in Greece. Minority members, who are graduated from other universities in Europe and other countries and received diploma equivalence in Greece, should have the right to enter that department. Furthermore, one-year education after graduation of four-year undergraduate education will not be enough for a high quality education in Turkish curriculum at minority schools. ABTTF recommends the establishment of a department of Turkish Literature and Language in Democritus University of Thrace for educators who will teach in Turkish curriculum at minority schools.

The law notes under 694/1977 only members of the Minority are allowed to serve in minority programme in Turkish curriculum at primary minority schools. Through Law 4310/2014 that Minority members are not allowed to teach in Greek curriculum at minority schools. Minority members, who are graduated from Greek faculties of education and teach in the Greek curriculum at minority schools, reacted against that on the ground this is a violation of the principle of equality enshrined in the Greek constitution. Furthermore, ABTTF would like to stress that there is no "Turkish" word in the text of the law while mentioning the curriculum in minority schools, which is Turkish. The word "minority programme" is used to define Turkish curriculum, while the word "Greek programme" is used for Greek curriculum in minority schools. We would like to remind that Greece does not subscribe to the right of Turkish minority to self-identification as "Turkish" on a collective basis and the right of assembly or association for minority associations which include the word "Turkish".

Through new law, two school counselors' staff, i.e. "Counselors for Minority Programme" who will make scientific and pedagogical guidance for teaching staff at primary and secondary minority schools in the Turkish curriculum is created. With the Ministerial Decision of the Ministry of Education and Religion(Protocol Number Φ.821/3451Π/213235/H2), Mehmet Derdiman for the regional unit of Rodopi and Evros, Nizam Ahmet for the regional unit of Xanthi have been appointed as school counselors for the Minority Programme at primary school education. Thus two minority schools counselors are appointed for the newly established "Minority Programme", while school counselors are in practice since 1985 at Greek programme. The Ministerial Decision notes that their appointments may not be less than four years and in any case expire automatically with the appointment and installation of school counselors' minority education in primary and secondary education program will be selected in the first after four years of a notice of Article 18 of N.3848 / 2010. Furthermore a school counselor staff is created for educators who teach Islamic religion instruction at Muslim madrasas, minority secondary and high school and the Religion Teachers at state schools under Article 53 of Law 4115/2013. ABTTF would like to remind that Law 4115/2013 on the status of Muslim preachers in Western Thrace which created two hundred forty (240) positions of religious officers of the Islamic religion (Quran teachers) with the task of teaching Quran in the mosques and public schools of primary and secondary education in Western Thrace received reaction and disapproval on the ground that this law would further allow the government to expand its control over religion in public schools in the region and would violate the self-governing structure of the Minority in the field of religion.

ABTTF admits that the quality of education in minority primary schools falls far below Greek public schools and teaching standards are allegedly poor. Through this law Greek

government aims to re-new building infrastructure and equipment, and modernize the institutional framework. But, Law 4310/2014, which is prepared with no dialogue with members and representatives of the Minority, will not be enough to solve current problems in minority education.

ABTTF regrets that a commonly stated problem of the absence of bilingual minority kindergartens mentioned in the report[2] of the former UN Independent Expert on Minority Issues Gay McDougall in 2008 and in the report of the Human Rights Without Frontiers International in 2012 is not included in Law 4310/2014, though a series of significant changes have been introduced. Through Law 3518/2006 the pre-school education for all children at the age of 5 has been made compulsory, and minority children are obliged to attend state kindergartens where the language of education is only in Greek. This contradicts with the principle of educational autonomy enshrined in the Lausanne Treaty. Furthermore, this violates the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union and EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and the Council of Europe's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, which Greece signed but not ratified yet. The former UN Independent Expert on Minority Issues Gay McDougall recommended in her country visit report on Greece in 2008 bilingual kindergartens would allow better knowledge of both Turkish and Greek from an early stage therefore providing benefits in terms of integration, and enabling greater choice of whether to go minority of Greek public primary school.

We urge Government of Greece:

- To respect its obligations under the Treaty of Lausanne and take measures in order to restore the autonomous structure in the field of education. Greece should respect, protect and promote the rights enshrined in the Lausanne Treaty and act in full compliance with the provisions of the Treaty and the core international human rights treaties of which Greece is a party.

- To repeal or amend relevant legislation in consultation and dialogue with representatives of the Turkish Minority,

- To establish a mechanism for dialogue between governmental authorities and the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace in the form of advisory or consultative bodies that will be the channel for the Minority to raise its own voice.

[2] For the full report A/HRC/10/11/Add.3, http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G09/111/98/PDF/G0911198.pdf?OpenElement